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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [CG](#) [BE](#)
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR AFRICOM DEPUTY COMMANDER YATES
TRIP TO BELGIUM

REF: BRUSSELS 314

Classified By: Political Economic Counselor Richard Eason for reasons 1
.4 (B) and (D).

11. (U) Deputy to the Commander of AFRICOM Yates, your trip to Brussels comes at a time when the Belgian government is eager for dialogue with the United States on Africa. Secretary of State Clinton met with Foreign Minister De Gucht March 6, and much of what De Gucht brought up centered on Africa. We hope your visit can contribute to our efforts to promote coordination with Belgium in areas where our interests and approaches coincide. Belgium's main concern in Africa is the Democratic Republic of Congo--Belgium's number one foreign policy priority. The Belgians believe their history and continued engagement with the DRC provides them with unique insight into the region. The GOB wants a stable, secure and peaceful Congo, and will work with the international community, the GoDRC, neighboring African countries, and in multilateral fora to achieve this aim. The Government of Belgium (GOB) is also concerned with events in neighboring countries that impact the DRC, including Rwanda, Burundi, Sudan, and Uganda. Further afield, the Belgians have trained Beninese peacekeepers and have development projects in a few other countries.

Outcomes and Goals for Your Visit

12. (C) We hope your visit will help demystify AFRICOM for those in the Belgian government who have been somewhat critical or uncertain of its purpose, especially the MFA. Please help our interlocutors understand the joint civil-military nature of AFRICOM and the diversity of its operations. We would also like to achieve an agreement during your visit on areas of cooperation between AFRICOM and the GOB. U.S. Embassy Brussels recommends the following concrete program of engagement with Belgium on Africa: making a U.S. contribution to Belgium's 2010 DASSA exercise in Benin, Belgian participation in the Africa Partnership Station in 2009, and an invitation to Belgium to send a delegation to AFRICOM to discuss lessons learned in the Congo. You could also ask the MFA about an outstanding request to co-host an SSR meeting in Brussels, to which AFRICOM would be invited. Our State colleagues have also asked us to encourage the Belgians to push the DRC on real institutional reform of the military, which is badly needed.

13. (C) We have arranged a wide variety of meetings for you to provide a broader insight into Belgium's relations with the Congo than you would obtain from the MFA and MOD alone. The dinner will include academics, businessmen, as well as MFA and MOD guests, that should contribute to a thoughtful discussion from Belgians knowledgeable about Africa. The lunch will include parliamentarians from several parties and

both language groups who are interested in Belgium's history and policy in Africa. The NGO roundtable participants are contacts recommended by those who work on Africa in Brussels and include a mix of humanitarian and development organizations.

Belgium's Goals in the Congo

¶4. (U) Belgium's new Ambassador in the Congo, former Ambassador to the U.S., Dominique Struye, took up his post in mid February, after an almost eight month freeze in Belgium's diplomatic relations with the DRC, due to FM De Gucht's strong criticism of DRC President Kabila in April, 2008. Belgium's next priorities are reopening its consulates in Bukavu and Lubumbashi, and restarting foreign assistance coordination. The GOB is a driving force in the EU for promoting European engagement with Africa.

¶5. (U) Belgium believes the Great Lakes Contact Group agenda is moving forward smoothly. Belgium's stated objective for the Congo is peace and stability, and the GOB views restoration of the state's capacity to promote law and order throughout the country as the best means to do so. However, the GOB realizes corruption, lack of effective command and control of the military, and the illicit export of mineral resources are major obstacles to ending armed internal conflict.

¶6. (U) The Belgians are involved in several activities they see as important in the DRC. They believe the security sector reform (SSR) program remains crucial in promoting security, strengthening the army, and in police and justice

programs. Training rapid reaction forces is also a Belgian priority. Belgium is looking at closer coordination with the U.S. in these areas. Accordingly, Belgium wants to look at ways forward on army reform, will make a push for improvements in openness and transparency in customs processes, and remains interested in the mineral resources sector and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI).

Belgian Concerns

¶7. (U) Belgium is skeptical of what it perceives as some partners' proposed "quick fixes" for the Congo, such as certain French initiatives and what it sees as a U.S. tilt toward military approaches. Inside the Belgian government and in public opinion, the recent Rwandan-DRC and Ugandan operations in the east of Congo were viewed very negatively, and Belgians are deeply troubled by media reports of supposed U.S. support of these operations. Belgium believes military operations will result in unacceptable civilian casualties and atrocities such as those reported in the aftermath of last month's operation by Ugandan forces against the Lord's Resistance Army. Acting A/S for African Affairs Phil Carter shared views on these issues during his visit February 26 (reftel).

¶8. (U) Belgium will remain interested primarily in the DRC, its periphery, and in assisting other countries in Africa to improve its credibility on Congo issues. In Sudan for instance, the MFA has allocated funds to train Sudanese diplomats from the north and south. The GOB is skeptical about self-determination for southern Sudan, and does not believe it could be a viable entity. Belgium has provided troops to the EU mission in Chad intended to protect refugees from Darfur. Belgium is also contributing a frigate to patrol the Somali coast starting in late 2009, and is committed to the Task Force on Piracy.

Areas for Cooperation

¶9. (C) The Embassy has identified three main areas for cooperation with Belgium on Africa. First, earlier this

year, the Belgians requested USG participation in the GOB's Benin training mission by providing medical support to the troops involved. This request was considered by AFRICOM but response time was too short. The training mission is an annual one and the request could be repeated for 2010. A positive response would build U.S. - Belgian ties. Second, we believe Belgium would be an excellent participant in the Africa Partnership Station in 2009, providing trainers for African militaries as do Germany, Portugal and some other NATO allies. Third, AFRICOM could welcome a delegation of Belgians to share lessons learned in the Congo. We are also working on obtaining Belgian agreement to co-host an SSR meeting with the GOB in Brussels, that we hope AFRICOM would attend. Secretary Clinton and FM De Gucht discussed Congo in detail March 6, and as a mission, we are looking for creative ways to increase our cooperation to strengthen U.S. - Belgian dialogue on Africa. Your meeting is an important part of what we hope to be an expanding dialogue between our two countries.

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